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Spicy Salmorejo Gazpacho

Serves 4

Spainards have perfected many things, tapas, wine, and paella. So it's no surprise they have also mastered gazpacho. This cold, tomato-based soup is the perfect dish to enjoy on warm summer nights — it's delightfully bright, yet surprisingly rich. This Andalusian classic, Salmorejo, incorporates a loaf of bread into a blended tomato base. The result is creamy, refreshing, and oh, so satisfying!

Ingredients:

8 large tomatoes
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 medium sweet onion, chopped
1 jalapeño pepper, stems and center removed, minced
1 red pepper, stems and seeds removed, chopped
1 tablespoon Sherry vinegar
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil, plus 2 tablespoons for drizzling
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1/4 teaspoon fresh cracked black pepper
1/2 teaspoon Spanish smoked paprika
1/2 loaf day old French bread, crust removed, cut into 2" cubes

Directions:

1. Bring a medium pot of water to a boil. With a sharp paring knife, cut an X on the bottom of the tomatoes and boil them in the water for 2 minutes until the skin begins to separate at the cut. Place tomatoes in an ice bath until cool quickly. Once cooled, peel off the tomato skin with your fingers. Discard the skin, remove the tomato core, and chop into 1" pieces.
2. Combine the tomatoes, garlic, onion, jalapeño, and red pepper in a high powered blender, and begin to pulse. Add the vinegar and olive oil, and blend until smooth.
3. Add the salt, pepper, and paprika and blend. Slowly add the cubes of bread and continue blending until the soup is creamy in consistency, adding 1-2 tablespoons of water if necessary.
4. Pour the salmorejo into a large pitcher. Cover and refrigerate for at least one hour to let the flavors incorporate.
5. Serve salmorejo chilled with a drizzle of olive oil, and a pinch of salt and pepper.

*Optional garnishes include ham, fresh herbs like basil or parsley, tuna, or a hard boiled egg.